



Children and Family Services  
Training Center  
Department of Social Work  
University of North Dakota

# Fostering Communications



Winter 2006

*Building a Network of People in the Foster Care System*

Vol. XX No. 1

## The Need for Foster Parent Support

*By Del Hager*

As has been reported in previous issues of *Fostering Communications*, since 2003, the North Dakota Department of Human Services, Children and Family Services Division, has been conducting annual child welfare services reviews in each of the eight human services regions. The federal Department of Human Services conducted its first Children and Family Services Review (CFSR) of North Dakota in 2001, as part of a national study of all states to see if the requirements to provide safety, permanency and well-being to the children and families being served in the child welfare system, were being achieved.

Foster parents from each region in North Dakota were asked to meet with the persons conducting the reviews in order to provide their opinions on a variety of issues related to the three main goals of safety, permanency and well-being. The "Stakeholder" meetings with foster parents and other service providers are another way for the federal and state policy makers to evaluate the entire child welfare system. The review process is more than just looking at case files to see if the documentation is in proper order; and, it's more than people within the system evaluating each other. It truly offers an extremely valuable outside opinion on how the system works for the betterment of the children and families being served.

The following are some of the comments made by North Dakota foster parents who addressed areas of strengths and needs as they relate to foster parent support. The comments are listed randomly and come from four regions of the state.

- A foster parent association has been formed recently in the region as a support group. Trainings are well received for foster parents who attend, however, the number of foster parents showing up is low. Picnics are also planned.
- Foster parent support group is available, however,

there is no active foster parent association.

- The foster parents provide support to one another.
- The foster parents miss the former County Foster Parent Support Group. They liked the support and training they received at this group.
- A PATH foster parent facilitates a foster/adopt support group, and county licensed foster parents are invited to attend.
- The State Foster Parent Association is so very important! Great place for networking.

As we can see, the role of support for foster parents is vitally important and needs to be part of a retention plan for every foster care agency. Nationally, the research also tells us that building a supportive relationship between foster parents and the agency will improve the rate of retention of those families.

Eileen Pasztor and Suzan F. Wynne, in *Recommendations for Retention and Support* (a publication of CWLA) provide the following helpful guidelines to foster parents and agency staff to help promote positive relationships and develop a strong sense of teamwork:

1. Clarify the foster parent's role in service delivery.
2. Provide competency-based preservice and inservice training.
3. Help foster parents feel affiliated and connected to the agency.
4. Place children with foster parents based on a match between the needs of the child and the competencies of the foster parents.
5. Provide mentors for new foster parents.
6. Involve foster parents in the development of policies that affect family foster care.
7. Collaborate with foster parents as members of a professional team.

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## From the State Office

*By Don Snyder, Foster Care Administrator*

May is Foster Care Month, and I wanted to take this opportunity to thank you for the work you do caring for North Dakota children and families. By opening your home and sharing your heart, you offer help to children and families in crisis and help promote the healing process.

North Dakota foster parents not only provide temporary homes, safety, and nurturing to our children, but they also help children reunite with their families. And, when reunification is not possible, many of our foster families choose to adopt the children who have been placed in their homes, offering permanency and stability these children would otherwise not know.

Your commitment leaves an indelible mark on generations to come. You are helping to end cycles of neglect, abuse and/or drug addiction and are often helping a child be the first in his or her family to finish high school or even go to college. Children leave your home knowing there are many positive paths available to them in life. Often, foster parents, such as you, do not receive the gratitude or recognition your efforts truly deserve. I appreciate all you do and wanted you to know that you are forever changing the lives of these children. Thank you for sharing your family and your home, your love, your encouragement, and your help to change a lifetime for children and families in need.

### SAVE THESE DATES!!!

The North Dakota Foster Parent Association annual conference will be held in Bismarck at the Ramkota Inn on **October 13-14, 2006**. This promises to be an enjoyable experience for your professional development and an opportunity to build a strong foster parent support network among peers from all parts of the state.

Reimbursement will be available for foster parents who have not exceeded their annual training requirements. First Aid Certification, CPR Recertification and Fire Safety Training will take place on Friday in addition to other speakers. The banquet and awards ceremony will follow a full day of training on Saturday. President James Schnabel will convene the Association business meeting during the Saturday luncheon.

We strongly encourage all North Dakota foster parents to become loyal members of the NDFPA by attending the Conference and participating in Association activities.

## President's Corner

*By James Schnabel*



As we enter a new year we all face new challenges and opportunities. That is also true for the North Dakota Foster Parent Association. As president of the NDFPA, I was contacted to be a member of the Court Improvement Project and also on the (Supreme Court) Chief Justice's task force dealing with issues regarding foster parents and foster children. (editor's note: please see the Pew Commission Progress Report article in this newsletter for additional information on these important national and state projects. It is a real honor to have the President of the NDFPA serve in this capacity.)

In November, the NDFPA board met to plan for the future of the association. We discussed a wide variety of issues and have started to set some plans in motion to make the association better. Foster parents supporting other foster parents continues to be a major concern and we are still trying to figure out how to best organize and develop each region. This is a task that appears easy on the surface but becomes very difficult in reality. I realize we are all very busy and sometimes just feel we don't have one more evening to give. There is much to be gained as you come together with your peers and share ideas dealing with various aspects of foster care. There are times when we need to spur each other on to continue the good fight for the children in our care.

The NDFPA is looking for your e-mail addresses so that we can notify you with information in a very timely fashion. We feel this would especially benefit all of us during the ND legislative session. There is strength in numbers and we need to approach some of these issues with a unified voice.

I look forward to visiting with and meeting many of you in 2006. If you have any concerns or input you want taken to the Court Improvement Project or the task force, feel free to contact me at any time. I am your president and am trying my best to represent you well. I am trying to make myself available to all foster parents. If you have any events, etc., please let me know how I, or NDFPA board members can help. May God bless you all for doing the work of foster parents in 2006.

You may contact me @ (701) 684-6211 or e-mailing [jmpmfarm@drte.net](mailto:jmpmfarm@drte.net)



### **Pew Commission Progress Report: State Courts, Congress Act on Commission Recommendations; Key Advocacy Groups Endorse Recommendations**

Less than two years after release of the Pew Commission's recommendations to reform foster care, states, state court leaders, and the U.S. Congress have acted to implement significant portions of its nonpartisan policy agenda, and several key advocacy groups have voiced their support for the recommendations.

#### **Action at the state level includes:**

- The leadership of state courts and child welfare agencies from almost every state participated in a first-of-its-kind national judicial summit in September, 2005. The summit was spearheaded by the Conference of Chief Justices and the Conference of State Court Administrators in partnership with the National Center for State Courts and the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. At the summit, state teams developed comprehensive action plans to speed the movement of children out of foster care and into safe, permanent families, guided in part by the Pew Commission recommendations. A national call to action reporting on the summit and summarizing the action plans will be released later this month by the National Center for State Courts.
- Fifteen states have established or are planning new commissions on children in foster care that include state court and agency leadership, as recommended by the Pew Commission. The states are: California, Delaware, Georgia, Indiana, Michigan, Mississippi, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Carolina, **North Dakota**, Pennsylvania, Utah, Washington, and Wisconsin.
- Four state Supreme Courts, in California, New York, Texas and Arkansas, have passed resolutions in support of the Pew Commission recommendations.
- Chief Justices across the country have answered the Pew Commission's challenge to serve as champions for children in their courts, bringing much needed high-level attention and targeted assistance to statewide efforts to strengthen the dependency courts.

#### **Action by Congress includes the following provisions in the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005:**

- \$50 million (over 5 years) in new grants to state Supreme Courts to strengthen state courts' oversight of children in foster care by adopting and using court performance measures.
- \$50 million (over 5 years) in new grants to state Supreme Courts to train judges, attorneys, and other personnel in child welfare proceedings, with a portion

of these training funds to be used for joint training with child welfare agency personnel.

- New requirements that state courts, child welfare agencies, and Indian tribes demonstrate "substantial, ongoing, and meaningful collaboration" in administering child welfare services as a condition for receiving federal child welfare funds.

These provisions of the Deficit Reduction Act mirror recommendations by the Pew Commission, as well as provisions in S. 1679 "WE CARE Kids: Working to Enhance Courts for At-risk and Endangered Kids Act of 2005," introduced last year by Senators Mike DeWine (R-OH) and Jay Rockefeller (D-WV).

#### **Key national advocacy groups took the following steps:**

- The National Congress of American Indians and the United South and Eastern Tribes passed resolutions in support of the Pew Commission's call for equitable treatment of Indian children in the dependency courts and in the way foster care and child welfare services are financed.
- The nation's leading judicial and legal associations – the Conference of Chief Justices, the Conference of State Court Administrators, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, the American Bar Association, and the National Association of Council for Children - have endorsed the Pew Commission's court recommendations.
- The North American Council for Adoptable Children and the National Council for Adoption have voiced their support for Pew Commission financing and court recommendations.

**About the Pew Commission:** The nonpartisan Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care was launched on May 7, 2003. Supported by grants from The Pew Charitable Trusts and The Annie E. Casey Foundation to the Georgetown University Public Policy Institute, the panel includes some of the nation's leading child welfare experts. The panel was charged with developing practical, evidence-based recommendations related to federal financing and court oversight of child welfare to improve outcomes for children in foster care, particularly to expedite the movement of children from foster care to safe, permanent families and to prevent unnecessary placements in foster care.

(This article was reprinted from the Pew Commission webpage. For additional information about the Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care, or to view its reports, please visit: [pewfostercare.org](http://pewfostercare.org).)



# Child Welfare Outcomes Improve Measurably

(Article reprinted from Children and Family News, February 2006.  
ND Department of Human Services' Children and Family Services Update)

Child welfare services in North Dakota have improved steadily since the 2001 federal Child and Family Service Review. No state met all of that review's high standards, but North Dakota came the closest to passing. As a result, states implemented program improvement plans. North Dakota's plan included the full rollout of wraparound services, the implementation of the Single Plan of Care (SPOC), the adoption of a regional review process mirroring the federal review, and numerous trainings.

**This month, federal officials released North Dakota from its program improvement plan.**

Children and Family Services Division Director Paul

Ronningen praised the combined work of staffs from the county social service offices, the department's regional human service centers, other partnering organizations, and the state office.

According to Ronningen, North Dakota's efforts have:

- Raised North Dakota's score on the 23 items of the federal Child and Family Service Review from 83 percent in 2001 to 98.3 percent in 2005;
- Positioned the state to pass three of the five national child welfare standards and put the state within two percentage points of passing the other two.

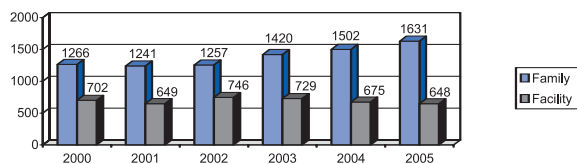
In addition, the implementation of SPOC – a web-based treatment plan – benefited children and families because services between agencies are better coordinated, families participate in plan creation, and all efforts are focused on permanency goals. SPOC also allowed counties to claim (be reimbursed for) \$485,000 in Medicaid funds during 2005. This represented new revenue.

The state's performance is measured using data from the foster care payment system known as CCWIPS, SPOC, and the in-state regional Child and Family Service Reviews.

## Trends: Family Foster Care\* & Group Home/Facility Placements in N.D.

By Federal Fiscal Year

- Family and relative placements are growing; institutional placements are declining.
- The N.D. child welfare system is committed to providing children with safety, permanency, and well-being in the least restrictive, most appropriate setting.



\* Family Foster care includes family foster homes, relative placements, pre-adoptive placements, and tribal affidavit foster home placements.

## CFSTC library adds new PRIDE digital curriculum on CD-ROM

If you are looking for training that you can access in the comfort of your own home at anytime, you need to check into the newest PRIDE training modules on the market. The just released, Digital Curriculum is a dynamic in-service training program that has captured nine PRIDE Core training modules and presents them in a CD-ROM format. If you have access to a computer with a CD drive you can participate in the Foster PRIDE education program at a distance.

This curriculum was developed in cooperation with Governor's State University, Illinois, the Child Welfare League of America and many state (including North Dakota) and private agencies. It represents an international best-practices model for developing and supporting foster families and adoptive families. This Digital version uses video stories, case studies, animations, interactive exercises, as well as interviews with a national cross section of foster parents, workers and former foster children to provide a rich and vibrant learning experience.

The PRIDE Model was developed to help foster parents and adoptive parents acquire the knowledge and skills they need to partner effectively with agencies to achieve permanence, safety, and well-being for children and youth.

Module 1 – The Foundation for Meeting the Developmental Needs of Children at Risk (4 CD Sessions – 12 hours)

Module 2 – Using Discipline to Protect, Nurture, and Meet Developmental Needs (3 CD Sessions – 9 hours)

Module 3 – Addressing Developmental Issues Related to Sexuality (1 CD Session – 3 hours)

Module 4 – Responding to the Signs and Symptoms of Sexual Abuse (2 CD Sessions – 6 hours)

Module 5 – Supporting Relationships Between Children and their Families (3 CD Sessions – 9 hours)

Module 6 – Working as a Professional Team Member (3 CD Sessions – 9 hours)

Module 7 – Promoting Children's Personal and Cultural Identity (2 CD Sessions – 6 hours)

Module 8 – Promoting Permanency Outcomes (4 CD Sessions – 12 hours)

Module 9 – Managing the Fostering Experience (2 CD Sessions – 6 hours)

CFSTC would like to encourage foster parents and social workers to visit our web page and look over the complete library of materials we have available. Books, films, videos and other resources can be checked out by completing order forms found on-line or by calling the Training Center at (701)777-3442. Our web address is: [www.cfstc.und.edu](http://www.cfstc.und.edu). Please visit us soon.

# NDFPA honors Bismarck family as ND Foster Parents of the Year

Leonard and Helen Berger estimate that somewhere between 150-200 foster children have stayed with them since their son came to them with a request to help his friend back in 1984. The young man was having trouble with his parents and ran away several times, usually ending up at the Berger's. His parents generally knew where he was but they would call the sheriff and the sheriff would come out to visit the Berger's. The Police Youth Bureau found out about the boy and they got involved with the family. Helen and Leonard didn't know they needed to be licensed to care for him until she called social services. They became licensed foster parents with Burleigh/Morton County in 1986 and after other failed placements, more running away from home and physical abuse, the boy finally came to live with them as their foster son.

They were licensed for the one specific boy, but it didn't take long for a social worker to call and ask if they could take another one. Pretty soon there was a girl needing an "overnight" placement; and, to this day, they have never been without a foster child since they became licensed. In 1988 they moved from a mobile home into a spacious rural home north of Bismarck where they have fostered up to four youth at a time, mostly teenagers. At one time they had three teenaged pregnant girls. One of those girls planned to release her baby for adoption but changed her mind right after the baby was born so the mother and baby lived with the Berger's. The mother eventually left foster care but the baby stayed until she was 18 months old, finally leaving to live with the mother. That was a very emotionally difficult time for them because they had grown so attached to the baby. After a period of time, they were able to reconnect with the mother and baby and had regular weekend visits and other extended contact until they moved out of state. The child would be about 14 years old now but they have not been able to locate her for quite a while.

Foster care has always been a partnership for Helen and Leonard. They share most of the parenting duties and always communicate when the children ask permission for special things. Their extended family has also been very good at including the foster children in family events. They introduce the kids as their son or daughter to other friends they meet. One of Leonard's friends recently commented how Mark (not the real name) "just lit up" and was so proud when Leonard called him his son. Leonard didn't realize at the time how important it was to the boy to feel like he really belonged with them.

They maintain contact with many of the children who have lived with them over the years. One of the boys, Bob (also not his real name), returned from Iraq and spent Christmas with them. One day the phone rang and it was Lowe's Home Improvement Store calling for Bob. A little while later the Lowe's truck was backed up to their door and they unloaded a new washer and dryer that Bob bought for the family. About two years ago, before he went into the service, he came for a visit and brought in

two new recliners, "Mr. and Mrs. chairs." One of the girls they fostered now lives in Colorado and she calls all the time. She has twins and has had problems in her life. She got married in Helen's wedding gown. Another girl lives in Nebraska and she comes here every summer and insists upon taking them out to supper at the new steak house.

Most of the kids come from Burleigh or Morton County and many are Native American. The ones that are supposed to be just for an overnight stay, most often are there for extended periods of time. Two sisters were supposed to be placed for three weeks but stayed three years. The longest placement is there currently and he's been with them for four years. Most of the kids work out very well but if a child feels like he isn't happy and doesn't want to be there, they encourage them to talk to their social worker and will try to find another place. "We've been pretty fortunate with the kids we've had here," Helen said.

They try to teach the youth to become independent but despite their best efforts, Helen and Leonard have found only partial success. Helen stated, "Every one of the kids, wanted to go on their own (at age 18). There hasn't been one, who didn't come back and say, 'the biggest mistake I made was going out on my own when I was eighteen.'" They make sure the kids always have a savings account and if they work, they can spend half of what they make but the other half goes into the savings account. Another learning activity is washing clothes. Helen does the laundry but if the youth doesn't bring their clothes to her, then she and the child go to the laundromat and they have to pay for getting them done on their own.

The Berger's are not ready to quite fostering yet. They reflect on some of the troubled youth and might question why they want to do this job, but then they think of all the other children out there that need a stable foster home. Leonard stated, "It's the 'thanks' you get afterward from them that keeps you going. Then you realize that you did something. Sometimes you don't even realize you're doing it."

## The Need for Foster Parent Support

*Continued from page 1*

8. Reimburse foster parents for the full cost of fostering.
9. Provide liability insurance to foster parents.
10. Establish policies, programs and practices for foster parent abuse allegation prevention and intervention.
11. Provide foster parents with regular supervision, monitoring and consultation as well as immediate support in times of crisis.
12. Provide foster parents with respite care.
13. Provide foster parents with child care services.
14. Provide foster parents with accessible, competency-

*Continued on page 6*

- based inservice training.
15. Provide foster parents with a foster family development plan.
  16. Provide foster parents with benefits commensurate with their skills.
  17. Provide foster parents with recognition of their accomplishments.
  18. Recognize the significance of relicensing.
  19. Provide foster parents with opportunities for professional development.
  20. Provide foster parents with access to their files.
  21. Create a grievance and appeal process.
  22. Provide foster parents with access to health and mental health services for the children in their care.
  23. Recognize the importance of the role of the Family Foster Care Social Worker.
  24. Provide foster parents with support to participate in local and state foster parent associations and the National Foster Parent Association.
  25. Conduct exit meetings to learn why foster parents are leaving.

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**NDFPA Executive Board**

**James Schnabel, President**, Venturia

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**Ellen Houska**, Grand Forks

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**Mary Jo Jangula**, Bismarck

**Legislative:** Neomi & Chad Nelson, Jamestown;

**Keatha McLeod**, Kindred

**Membership:** Helen Berger, Bismarck

**Scholarship:** Vicki Hoff, Minot

**Mission Statement:** Vernon Kersey, Bismarck;

**Carrol Burchinal**, Bismarck; **Janine Thull**, Mandan

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